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HOSPITAL AND TRAINING SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

IN CHARGE OF
MARY M. RIDDLE, R.N.

NURSES' UNIFORMS

The question of uniforms for nurses has long been under discussion from various points of view.

A pupil nurse is required to wear the uniform of her school for several reasons: it makes for uniformity in appearance and the management is perfectly sure each nurse will be dressed in good taste, that is, appropriately, which might or might not happen if the matter of dress were left entirely to the pupil.

Almost every graduate nurse can recall instances when she has been uncertain of the propriety of her dress for a given occasion and has reverted in her mind to the time when she donned her school uniform with satisfaction, knowing it to be the best of its kind and therefore entirely appropriate for its time and place. What a comfort it would be to know that the garment which is the product of the combined thought and taste of the owner with those of the corner dress-maker is equally suitable when required to be worn! Besides being suitable, the uniform is, or should be, the most hygienic form of dress, at least for hospital wear. Barring some forms of neckwear which have been justly criticised, there is seldom any reflection cast upon the hospital uniform because of resultant unhygienic conditions. To go a step farther it may be said that in these days of aseptic surgery no dress excepting that which can come fresh from the laundry at regular and frequent intervals is considered safe for hospital and sick room wear.

All training schools insist that the prescribed uniform be worn while the pupil is on duty in the wards of the hospital and most of them say it shall not be worn upon the street nor in any other place, except when in direct care of the sick. It should not be worn upon the street for various reasons, of which one may be cited, viz., it cannot then be kept clean enough for ward wear.

Thus it is made an honored, yes, almost a sacred contribution to the training school instruction of the nurse. This may seem a strong statement, but none too strong to the thoughtful nurse who knows

all that her uniform meant to her in the arduous days of training; she remembers that it was to her a monitor in ethics, guarding her person and guiding her deportment with a strong and steady hand by reason of the deep-seated conviction that whatever occurred, the uniform must not be smirched by any appearance of wrong doing on her part. The school fostered this sentiment until her feeling for her uniform is akin to that she has for the flag of her country. She delights in it and is ready to salute it when meeting it in an unexpected place.

It is known to have its influence, too, upon those who are nursed or cared for by the wearer. So thoroughly has this been understood by directors of children's hospitals that their efforts have been directed toward securing attractive and pretty uniforms for the nurses serving the children. It seems incongruous to think of a nurse's cap being adorned with pink ribbons, but it has occurred and with good results to the sick children in her care. What is true of children is equally true of adults though in a different degree. Many a man or woman in the adult wards of the hospital has consciously or unconsciously braced up at the vitalizing sight of the energetic nurse in her fresh and correct uniform. He at once feels himself in good company and is "heartened" and self-respecting. Perhaps it may be simply the old story that good manners promote good morals. It may not be so labelled, but it all amounts to a lesson in ethics.

In the analysis of this conclusion one must find that it is not in the clean cut and well-fitting uniform alone, it is not in the soldierly bearing of the wearer, but in the fact that it is associated in his mind with something else, something which has brought to him peace and comfort with a refining influence which he cannot so designate but which he knows and cannot forget.

For this reason the use of nurses' uniforms for other purposes than that of being worn by one caring for the sick, should be deplored. They are sacred to their intended use and every departure from that plan has a tendency to cheapen the whole idea of nursing affairs. By reason of the spectacular effect, benevolent societies have secured a great asset when they have obtained the services of a group of nurses in uniform, or a group of society girls dressed in the nurses' costume to act as distributors of programmes or refreshments; to sell tickets or tags or what not, but the fact that the proceeds of the fair are for the local hospital, or Red Cross or other form of charity will not excuse the defamation of the uniform.

A graduate nurse's uniform is more apt to be of commercial value to her and for that reason is put off and on at convenience, or it is not a uniform at all, but is a medley or possibly a cross between a negligee

and a fashionable tailor-made gown of washable material. It is a pity the graduate nurse so often discards her uniform when on private duty, but the tailor-made gown, if comfortable and adapted to the work in hand, is apt to be pleasing and dignified and therefore not a subject of criticism. It is the negligee or the over accentuated gown that is deplored when it makes its entry into the hospital ward, worn by the graduate special, with neck too low and skirt far too scant to fulfill the most elementary rules of decorum. If a dress can be said to be comfortable without being conspicuous, pretty without being extravagant and adaptable to the use to which it must be put, then it will naturally be acceptable to patients and others who must be more or less intimately associated with it.

In some countries and even in some cities in our own land, outdoor uniforms are worn. The plea for their use has been that they are a protection to the wearer. There is doubt in the minds of many as to the validity of this reason for their use. District nurses are properly in uniform because they are on duty, but when the ordinary nurse is going about as an ordinary citizen, she is happier and more normal if dressed as an ordinary citizen. The American people are not always credited with having modest, retiring natures, but when not so credited they are often misjudged. There is really very little that is pompous or flamboyant in the make-up of the average American, therefore he likes to pass unnoticed.

If this reason shall seem a self-righteous one, then let it be said that the average American is too independent to receive dictation as to his costume for street wear when he is about his own business.

TOO LATE FOR CLASSIFICATION

MONTANA

The Montana State Board of Examiners for Nurses will hold a special meeting and examination for the registration of nurses on February 23, 1915, at 9 A. M. at the State Capitol, Helena.

R. LESTER BENNETT, R.N.,
Secretary.